



NEWS RELEASE

ARIZONA SUPREME COURT

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ARIZONA COURTS' PENALTY ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM RECOVERS RECORD LEVEL OF COLLECTIONS

PHOENIX – As Arizona officials work to resolve the worst budget crisis in state history, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) this week announced collections at continuing record levels for the state of Arizona from the Administrative Office of the Court's Penalty Enforcement Program (PEP).

"We are really pleased that the courts and their employees have played such an effective role in achieving this level of success in the first phase of this program," says Dave Byers, Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

In 1993, the Legislature authorized the AOC to certify to the Arizona Department of Revenue (DOR) amounts that are ordered by the courts, but remain unpaid. The DOR was authorized to intercept Arizona income tax refunds to satisfy court-ordered fines, surcharges and fees submitted by participating courts. Over the years, the process has evolved from one that was very paper-intensive to one that now is highly automated. Since its inception, more than \$9 million has been collected.

"This level of collection was possible because of progress made with court automation," explains Byers, "an initiative that has been a judicial priority for the past ten years."

Last year that rate of court collections increased to \$2.3 million. Chief Justice Charles E. Jones subsequently presented a targeted plan to the Governor and Legislature that called for an additional \$2 million in collections this calendar year, which would have raised the total annual amount to \$4.5 million.

As of this month, the actual amount collected through the PEP program is \$5.5 million, representing a 120 percent increase over 2002.

The PEP plan has three other phases including Federal tax intercept refunds.

Endorsed as a concept by the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ), the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) and the National Association of Court Management (NACM), the next phase of the program's four-phase implementation plan includes a coordinated effort with Capitol Hill staff for the passage of comparable Congressional legislation authorizing Federal interception of these owed monies.

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